

and I built a home for you, for me

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and I built a home for you, for me

by [youreyeslookliketheocean](#)

Summary

The intruder groaned and rolled over, and Phil finally got a good look at him.

It was a child. A child who couldn't be much older than four or five, with brown eyes and stringy brown curls now plastered to his forehead. Tiny hands reached up to grip the knit sweater Phil had doused. Tiny legs curled into the child's chest, little black socks the only thing between his feet and the floor. There was a hole in one, tiny toes poking through the top.

The child let out a quiet whimper, and Phil's heart skipped a beat.

"Are you... are you alright?"

Before Phil's home became a boarding house full of hybrids, it was a nest built for two. ...Or maybe three.

Notes

This work is technically a prequel to "[patience and pin feathers](#)", but can be read as a standalone fic.

Also, as a quick note, avians are just what people call younger, not-yet-fully-developed elytrians in this AU.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Phil had conquered many beasts in his lifetime, both physically and metaphorically. He'd slain his first zombie when he was seven, albeit in a panic and frantically screaming for his father the entire time. He'd taken a leap of faith when he was six and consequently learned to fly. He'd set out to travel the world when he got older, and ran across so many obstacles that he thought of turning back every other week. He'd even slain a dragon, once. But never—*never*—had Phil encountered anything quite so difficult to conquer as a child.

When Tommy's wailing cut through his work for the fifth time that day, Phil decided enough was enough. He set down his tools, slipped his wings out of the cloth coverings he'd sewn for them (they saved him from having to preen itchy sawdust out of his feathers every night), and pulled off his work goggles. He wiped his sweaty hands on the sides of his robe, and clambered down the ladder from the half-built second story of the Pube to the main floor.

He'd only moved into the Pube a few months ago. The first floor had been built in a frenzy of activity exactly five months ago, just a few days after Phil stumbled across a tiny avian egg laying abandoned in the forest and decided—for some odd reason that he still wasn't completely sure of—that right then was the perfect time to become an adoptive father. The walls still smelled of pine, and the thin layer of beeswax covering the floor still squeaked under his bare feet. The construction was hasty and haphazard, Phil working tirelessly to make sure the little avian had a place to call home when he eventually hatched. Still, Phil never did things in halves, and the Pube's first floor looked gorgeous. There was the kitchen bar in the back right corner, and an open balcony carpeted with the softest grass Phil could transplant there. Lamps hung from the ceiling and shed golden light across the caramel colored floor late at night. There was a storage room to his left full of chests, and a room to his right that he... well... he actually hadn't quite figured out how to fill that one yet. He figured it would come to him eventually. Then, tucked beside the storage room was an even smaller nook stuffed with blankets, pillows, twisted sheets and Phil's softest sweaters.

Phil pushed aside the curtains leading to that nook and stepped inside. His feet immediately sank into fluffy sheep's wool and downy feathers, and he had to duck to avoid catching his hair on the winding strand of string-lights hung from the tiny rafters above him.

This was Phil's most precious place. His favorite spot in the whole house. It was his *nest*. *Their* nest. It contained all of Phil's most valuable things, which admittedly, because he travelled so much, there were not many of. There was one thing tucked away there, though, that Phil valued above all others. And that was Tommy.

"Hi there, little bird," Phil said quietly, mouth twitching upwards as the tiny avian boy blinked wide, sky blue eyes up at him. He was laid atop one of Phil's softest knit sweaters, the pale yellow color contrasting with the blue of Tommy's eyes and making his golden hair shine even brighter.

"What are you doing awake? I *just* put you down again."

Tommy gurgled up at him, flapping and kicking tiny, four-month old limbs as if to say 'I'm awake! I'm awake! And look how much energy I have!'.

Phil sighed, bending down to scoop Tommy up by the armpits. Tommy immediately stopped flailing, letting his dad readjust him so he was cradled safely between two arms.

“Are you hungry?” Phil asked, shooting Tommy a teasing grin. “Is that what all this whining is about? I changed your diaper the last time, so I know it’s not that.”

Tommy hummed, raising one hand to lazily slap at Phil’s chin. Phil laughed.

“Okay then. Let’s try that. This’ll be the third bottle in five hours, though. People are going to start thinking you’re a pig hybrid.”

Tommy let out an indignant screech, smacking his hand particularly ferociously into Phil’s mouth and chin. The third time his hand came down, Phil dipped his head and caught the tiny fingers gently between his lips.

Tommy squealed in delight, yanking his hand free, and Phil felt something in his chest squeeze tight and warm. He slipped out from the nest, crossing the floor to the kitchen. There were baby bottles stored away under the counter, and about ten jars full of milk in the fridge—fresh from the meadow’s cows. Just for this. Just for Tommy.

Phil hadn’t known how much he’d really wanted to be a dad until he was one. Sure, he’d always found the little avians in his old village cute, but he’d barely been twenty years old then, and once he left to travel he’d kind of forgotten about them. Travel did that to people, sometimes. Made them forget where they came from as they reinvented themselves into the person they’d left home to become. Phil hadn’t left home to become a father. And yet, thirteen years and two months after stepping out of his childhood home for the last time, he’d stumbled across Tommy.

He’d found Tommy’s egg in a forest, abandoned in the grass by whomever had birthed him. It wasn’t uncommon to find avian eggs strewn about. Elytrians tended to lay eggs rather frequently, and for some who deemed they had too many to keep up with, some sacrifices had to be made.

Of course, Phil hated that idea. He hated the idea of purposefully leaving a child—even if one out of hundreds—alone and parentless. But he was used to seeing them. So when the tip of a small, cream colored egg poking out of the grass caught his eye in the Enchanted Forest, he was a little surprised when his heart gave a lurch, urging him towards it as if he hadn’t seen dozens of them abandoned like this before.

Maybe, somewhere in the back of his brain, he’d known it was time for him to settle down. Maybe it was his elytrian instincts being stronger than usual. Either way, Phil had seen the egg, picked it up, and known, immediately, what he had to do.

He’d found land for the Pube first. A tiny floating island in the center of a wide, open meadow. He built the first floor while anxiously awaiting Tommy’s hatch, took a break for the first three months after—struggling to keep up with a baby who cried half the night and slept half the day. And now here he was, being distracted from building the second floor by Tommy’s incessant shrieking.

It was okay. Tommy was a good distraction.

Phil knelt down next to the kitchen counter, pulling open the barrel where he kept Tommy's baby bottles. He fished a clean one out, headed to the ice-box fridge he'd constructed, and pulled open the door with Tommy still tightly pressed to his chest.

Huh.

Phil frowned, reaching forward to pick a jar of milk from the top shelf. That was weird. He swore he'd restocked the milk recently. There'd been ten jars full of it, but now, looking at the inside of his little icebox, there were only a measly four and a half jars lining the top shelf. Had he really been that out of it that he forgot using up five other jars? Or had it just been longer than he thought since he last restocked?

The thing about building a house and dealing with a four-month-old child simultaneously was that time seemed to become a meaningless pile of mush. Sure, there was some structure he had to follow—like feeding times and nap times for Tommy—but, besides that, time seemed to stretch on for infinity, without any real breaks or divides. Phil was up at 3am just as often as he was up at noon. He was working at midnight sometimes, and napping with Tommy at one in the afternoon. So maybe he'd lost count of the days, somehow. It wouldn't be too far of a stretch. But he could have *sworn*—

A chest banged shut in the storage room, and Phil nearly dropped the jar of milk in his hand. He whirled from the fridge, grip tightening on Tommy as his eyes darted to the open foyer. There was no one there, only specks of dust floating through streaks of sunshine, but the chest-room was partially concealed from view by a wall. If Phil wanted to be sure, he would have to walk over there.

Phil crept forwards, leaving the kitchen behind in favor of investigating. Tommy had gone completely silent in his arms, as if he sensed that now was not the time to be babbling.

"Hello?" Phil called out as he slipped closer, giving anyone in there a chance to make themselves known. "Is someone there? I have a... a..." Phil wracked himself for a word, some weapon he could use if needed. Unfortunately, the only things in his hands were Tommy and a jar of milk. Neither of those were very threatening.

Giving up on the threat, Phil sidestepped around the corner and into the storage room.

Nothing.

All the chests were stacked exactly as they had been, dusty rugs Phil had been meaning to lay out piled up on top of one, and dirty laundry stuffed into a bin beneath another. His toolbox and crafting table sat at the back of the room, wood shavings still scattered across both of them from his work on the house earlier that day. Nothing had been changed, nothing moved.

Phil released a breath, letting his arm loosen around Tommy's tiny frame. No one was here. Of course no one was here. Phil had been here the whole day, and not once had his sensitive ears heard the front door open, or keen eyes spotted someone sneaking in through the open

balcony. The front door was still locked. The wind must have blown a chest lid open. Or maybe something had fallen in the back.

Tommy began fussing in Phil's arms again, and Phil turned away from the storage room to go finish making his bottle.

"Sorry, little bird. Thought I heard something. I guess it was just—"

A scuffle of feet against the waxed floor behind Phil sent him spinning around, his wings extending to their full length. One wing caught on the curtained doorway to the nest, accidentally yanking it open and revealing the inside, where a sweater was hovering midair.

A sweater was... hovering?

Phil blinked, mouth falling open as he stared at the levitating yellow sweater. It was the same one that had been cushioning Tommy, before. It hung suspended in the air for all of five seconds before vanishing, popping away into non-existence. But that was long enough.

Phil jumped forward, flinging both wings out to block the doorway to the nest. A millisecond later, something solid slammed into the bottom of his right wing. Phil curled it into himself, wrapping it tight so whatever he'd trapped couldn't escape.

Unfortunately, the thing was smart. Phil yelped as he felt two hands yank matching fistfuls of feathers from his wings. He jolted back, and that slight unfurl of his wing was just enough for the intruder to slip through. Phil saw a flash of the yellow sweater as the person made their escape, and then the trail of his own feathers as whoever it was darted toward the balcony.

"Hey!" Phil called after them. "Stop!"

The person didn't stop, but this time Phil caught a shimmering glance of him as he bolted toward the balcony's edge. He was small, scrawny, with a mop of curly brown hair—but Phil had seen smaller intruders before. There was a whole species of Inchlins rumored to live in a biome nearby, and a few had lived in Phil's old village. They were such small creatures that it was almost impossible to catch them when they robbed you.

The person flickered into existence again, this time much closer to the edge. And that's when it happened. The boy bled into visibility right as the clouds shifted above them. Warm, honey-yellow sunlight poured through the holes in the balcony's lattice roofing, lighting up the patch of grass the intruder had just stepped into. There was a shriek, and a hiss, and suddenly the intruder was completely visible because he was *on fire*.

The boy dropped to the ground, screaming, and flailed his legs in what had to be agonizing pain. He tried to roll himself back into the shade, but his body seemed to twitch almost on its own accord, and he couldn't make it there. He screamed again, the sound bloodcurdling and terrified, as the flames licked higher.

Phil's eyes blew wide.

He worked almost on autopilot. The kitchen sink was right there, so he bolted to it. The milk in his hands would do him no good—there wasn't enough of it to douse a full person—so he tossed it to the counter and scrambled for a bucket under the sink. He filled the bucket as full as he could before the person's screams turned agonizing, and he yanked it away, leaving the tap running as he ran for the balcony. With the one hand not clinging to Tommy, Phil dumped the water bucket over the intruder's body. The fire hissed, disappearing as the person spluttered for air, not having expected Phil's bucket. Water trickled to the ground, creating a gigantic puddle that Phil could only pray wouldn't turn to mud later.

Phil grabbed the person's arm before he could say anything, dragging him back into the Pube's shade. Once they were both back on wooden floor, Phil plopped to the ground, his whole body shaking.

What had just happened?

"Baba!" Tommy squealed, flapping his hands at Phil's face.

The intruder groaned and rolled over, and Phil finally got a good look at him.

It was a child. A child who couldn't be much older than four or five, with brown eyes and stringy brown curls now plastered to his forehead. Tiny hands reached up to grip the knit sweater Phil had doused. Tiny legs curled into the child's chest, little black socks the only thing between his feet and the floor. There was a hole in one, tiny toes poking through the top.

The child let out a quiet whimper, and Phil's heart skipped a beat.

"Are you... are you alright, mate?"

That was all it took, apparently, for the floodgates to release. The kid brought soaked hands to his face, sobbing into them as Phil sat, stunned.

"I didn't mean to," the boy blubbered, his words punctuated by loud cries, "I only wanted food...n' clothes n'...maybe a diamond but...only to trade and—"

He cut himself off with another heaving sob, and Phil shifted closer.

"Are you hurt?" Phil asked, figuring that was the most important question at the moment. "Did the fire burn you?"

The boy sniffled. "Only a little."

"Where?"

The boy raised his right arm, holding it out to Phil. "Here. It hurts."

Phil gently pushed up the kid's sleeve. Sure enough, an angry red burn peeked out at him. The skin around it was pink and inflamed. Phil didn't dare touch it, instead carefully tugging the wet wool back down over it.

“It’s good to leave the water on it. I’ll get you some cream, too. And a healing potion, if I have any. Anywhere else?”

The boy shook his head. His sobs had trickled off into quiet sniffles, and he reached up to swipe at his nose.

“What happened? How did you catch on fire?”

“The sun burns me sometimes,” the boy explained, sucking in a large inhale. “I usually go invisible, to hide from it.”

Phil tilted his head, confused. “Invisible? Are you a phantom hybrid?”

Wilbur nodded, swiping one last time at his nose. Snot was all over the sleeve of Phil’s sweater, but oh well. He’d just have to clean it later. At least he knew the kid was a phantom hybrid, now. That meant any burns he experienced would most likely fade quickly, all on their own.

“Babaaa!” Tommy screamed again, flapping his hand at the little boy.

The boy laughed wetly. Slowly, he pushed himself up into a sitting position. “Is that your baby?” he asked.

Phil smiled, glancing down at Tommy in his arms. He was wriggling aggressively, attention entirely caught by the little boy in front of them. His tiny wings kept jutting into Phil’s chest.

“Yes. This is Tommy.”

“Hi Tommy,” the boy said, pushing wet bangs out of his eyes. “My name’s Wilbur.”

Wilbur.

Phil hummed. “Wilbur. That’s a nice name.”

Wilbur smiled, the first smile Phil had seen on him. It was warm and beaming, and made some little part of Phil’s heart expand.

“Thanks. My mom gave it to me.”

Phil laughed, lowering Tommy to his lap as Wilbur scooted closer. “Well she has good taste. Where is your mom? Do you live around here?”

Phil had specifically picked this section of land for the Pube because of how empty it’d been, but considering how little he’d left the house in the past few months, it was entirely possible that new people had moved in and—between building the house and taking care of Tommy—he just hadn’t realized.

Wilbur plucked at the hem of Phil’s sweater, flinging tiny water droplets to the floor beneath him. “My mom left,” Wilbur said. “She went to the End. My daddy went with her.”

Phil's heart sank. The End was not a place for humans of any kind. Not even hybrids. But it was an excuse. An excuse given by medics and village healers when someone's family passed on and they wanted to break the news lightly.

"You see, the universe loved her so much it just had to take her back," a healer had said to a twelve-year-old Phil, once, in a place he'd long since left behind.

"Take her back where?"

"To the stars. The sun. The End."

Phil cleared his throat. "So who do you live with, while they're gone?"

Wilbur stared up at him with curious brown eyes, as if the concept of living with someone else had never before occurred to him. "I live with just me. Do you want to see my house?"

Phil shook his head slowly. "No, no. That's alright. Are you... you said you were looking for food?"

Wilbur nodded.

"What do you like?"

"Mmmm... I like bread and honey," Wilbur said, tilting his head up to the rafters as he thought. "And milk. I like milk."

Phil smiled, already getting back to his feet. Tommy squawked in his arms. "Tommy likes milk too. Do you like yours warm or cold?"

"Cold. I... um. I already drank some of yours."

Phil had figured. "That's alright. You just take a seat on the stools over here. I'll get you a snack."

The sink was still running next to the unopened jar of milk. Phil turned it off, then got a glass cup from cabinet above and filled it halfway with milk. The rest he poured into Tommy's bottle, screwing the lid on tightly before flipping it over and offering it to him. Tommy immediately latched onto the bottle, sucking down the liquid as if it had been days since his last meal, not a mere two hours.

"You little shit," Phil teased, shaking his head. "If you're this dramatic when you're older, I don't know what I'm going to do with you."

He picked up Wilbur's cup and brought it over to the barstool counter. Wilbur had timidly migrated his way over to it, and was busy trying to hoist himself onto a stool. It was a bit of a stretch for a four-year-old, but he managed to make it up.

Phil passed him the cup of milk, and watched as Wilbur eagerly started to gulp it down.

"How long have you been living by yourself?" Phil asked.

Wilbur swallowed a gulp of milk and shrugged. "I don't know."

"A long time? Or only a little while?"

"A little while."

Phil nodded, some small part of himself relaxing. At least he hadn't been alone for too long.

"How old are you? Do you know?"

Wilbur set down his cup. Laboriously, he poked four fingers up on his right hand and held it up for Phil to see.

"I'm this many."

"Four?"

Wilbur nodded once before returning to his milk.

Four. A four-year-old, who'd been living alone for the past who-knew-how-long, had somehow snuck his way into Phil's house with the intent to rob him. It was almost as funny as it was concerning.

Phil kept Tommy's bottle in place as he moved through the kitchen, gathering up the bread and honey. Tommy's eyes were drooping already, his tiny fingers loosening their hold on the bottle. It was amazing how quickly a bottle could put him to sleep. It was like a sleep potion.

"Mister...?" Wilbur trailed off.

"Phil," Phil said. "You can just call me Phil."

"Oh. Phil? Did you make this house all by yourself?"

Phil nodded. He brought the bread and honey over to Wilbur, delighting in the way the four-year-old's eyes lit up at the sight of it. Carefully, he pulled two plates from one of the cabinets and set about laying the pieces of bread across them. When he'd finished, he let Wilbur help him pour honey over both pieces, and by the time they finished, Tommy was fast asleep against his chest.

"My mom saw you building it a long time ago, when we were looking for a new place to live," Wilbur rambled, picking up his piece of honeyed bread. "She said we would have to come say hi. But she left before we could."

"Yeah?"

Wilbur's fingers were already sticky with honey. He took a bite of the bread, and the golden syrup smeared across his upper lip. "Yeah."

"You must live close by, then."

“Mhm,” Wilbur hummed with his mouth full. “My house ‘s jus’ o’er da mount’in.”

Phil looked up, surprised. “The big one?”

Contrary to its name, Big Hill was not a hill as much as it was a gigantic mountain. It towered even higher than the floating island the Pube was built upon, serving as the separator between the meadow and the Enchanted Forest on the other side.

“Yeah.”

“You walked all the way here from the other side of that mountain? How?”

If Phil hadn’t been able to fly, it would have taken him a full day just to scale one side of Big Hill. For a four-year-old to have made it all the way here, seemingly without a scratch, was unbelievable.

“I walked through it,” Wilbur shrugged. As if to prove it, he squeezed his eyes shut and flickered out of visibility for the briefest second before returning. He let out a breath as his body shimmered back into tangibility, as if the act of going invisible took all his energy. Maybe it did. Phil had never met a phantom hybrid in person before. “See!”

Phil didn’t ‘see,’ actually. Being invisible was quite ironic in that sense. But he smiled anyway.

“That’s pretty neat, mate,” he said.

“Thanks!”

Wilbur finished off his first piece of bread and wiped his fingers on his pants. He licked his lips, and his eyes drifted down to Tommy’s sleeping form again.

“How old is Tommy?” he asked.

“Four months old.”

“Wow—” Wilbur’s eyes widened. “—he’s *tiny*. Is he an elytrian like you?”

“He’s an avian right now, but once he grows enough pin feathers, yes, he’ll be an elytrian too.”

Wilbur rocked back on the barstool. “Is that why you’re making your house tall? So he can fly in it?”

A grin slid across Phil’s face. “No, I’m building a second floor so I can give him his own bedroom eventually, when he’s older.”

“Like a family house?”

“Like a family house.”

“Oh.” Wilbur’s gaze returned to Tommy. There was something there, something quiet and longing in his eyes as he looked at him and Phil. But as soon as he looked away it disappeared. “I should go home.”

Immediately, Phil’s chest tightened. It wasn’t just that he thought Wilbur was adorable and had maybe possibly gotten just the *tiniest* bit attached in the ten minutes he’d known him for. It was also the fact that the sun was still shining dangerously bright outside, and Wilbur’s house was all the way on the other side of Big Hill, and Wilbur was four, and tiny, and alone, and quite literally anything could happen to him once he left. There were mobs. Creepers and spiders that stayed out during the day. It would only take one of them to seriously injure a four-year-old child. It would only take one of them to kill him.

Phil didn’t want him to go.

“You could stay here, you know,” Phil said. “If no one’s with you back home. I— We could make room.”

“But... I thought this house was for your family?”

“It is. It’s...” Phil trailed off.

Wilbur was looking up at him with wide eyes. His hair was starting to dry, wild curls springing up from behind his ears and over his forehead. His cheeks were pink, and there was a little burn mark on his chin that Phil must have missed before. He stared up at Phil like he was offering him something more than just a place to stay. And maybe he was.

Tommy shifted in his sleep, tiny fingers grabbing hold of Phil’s robe and holding tight. This was his son.

Phil looked at the little four-year-old sitting at the barstool in front of him, soaked and burnt, with honey-covered fingertips and wide brown eyes.

Phil hadn’t known how much he’d really wanted to be a dad until he was one.

This could be his son too.

End Notes

thanks for reading!! and yes, the title is lyrics from "To Build a Home" by The Cinematic Orchestra.

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comments and kudos are always appreciated. also, follow me on [tumblr](#)!

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